

## **Why After-School?**

### **Executive Summary**

Many states and local districts have taken the initiative to establish and fund after-school opportunities for elementary, middle, and high school youth to: provide a safe haven for young people, improve academic achievement, improve student behavior, and reduce risk-taking behaviors and substance abuse.

High-quality after-school programs can directly address the two strongest risk factors impacting children and youth - (1) academic difficulties in school and (2) unsupervised time after school. These risk factors are the strongest predictors of adolescent substance abuse and behavioral issues. There is solid research evidence showing that after-school programs reduce youth violence and gang activity, reduce alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, increase school and community connectedness, improve academic achievement, and narrow the achievement gap.

There is national and local data indicating significant risk factors impacting our youth ranging from dual working parents, large amounts of unsupervised time, easy access to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, academic challenges, low community and school attachment, increasing youth violence and youth gang activity, and a lack of positive youth activities at the community level.

Research indicates that high-quality after-school programs can markedly increase engagement in learning and students who are engaged in learning behave better in school, have better work habits, improved attitudes towards school, a greater sense of belonging to the community, and better relationships with parents. Recent cost benefit analyses indicate that after-school programs are likely to produce a significant return on the initial investment. In addition, businesses report reduced turnover, lowered absenteeism, and increased productivity where quality after-school programs were available

The after-school hours (3 to 6 pm) are the prime time for juvenile crime and gang-related crime on school days. A leading risk factor for joining gangs is unsupervised time spent with friends. After-school programs can protect youth from gang violence, remove some of the pressure to join gangs, and shut off the pipeline that delivers youth into gangs.

High-quality after-school opportunities can provide young people with a positive alternative to spending time on the streets or being home alone. Participating in positive, goal-directed activities can give all youth an opportunity to develop skills, build character, and partake in challenging, fulfilling opportunities. It can also lessen their chances of engaging in risk-taking behaviors by occupying idle time, strengthening commitment to school and community, and exposure to positive peer and adult influences.

High-quality after-school programs help all youth be safe, stay drug- and alcohol-free, avoid the pressure of gangs, succeed in school, form positive relationships with adults, make new friends, contribute to the community, and learn new skills.